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The Demise of a Long-Lived If Sloppy Spy Ring

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SAN FRANCISCO
A Federal jury rang down the final curtain last week on an espionage conspiracy that began with a meeting between two Navy buddies in 1974 at a now-defunct San Diego restaurant called Boom Trenchard's Flarepath. After 10 days of deliberation, the jury found a former Navy radioman, Jerry A. Whitworth, guilty on seven counts of espionage and five counts of tax fraud for passing military data to John A. Walker Jr., who sold it to the Soviet Union for nearly a decade.

"I didn't think it would come to this," Mr. Whitworth told a friend in a tearful telephone conversation just before his arrest in June 1985. That it did so seems to have been in part Mr. Whitworth's own doing. By his defense attorney's admission, he sent a series of anonymous letters to the Federal Bureau of Investigation describing the theft and sale to Soviet agents of secret Navy cryptographic data, message traffic and wiring diagrams for the machines used to encode and decode classified messages. In the letters, Mr. Whitworth

offered to expose "a significant espionage system" in exchange for freedom from prosecution, but then changed his mind, saying that the discovery of his identity would be "remote" as long as he kept silent.

Despite having received \$332,000, tax-free, from Mr. Walker for the military secrets, the former farm-boy from Muldrow, Okla., ended his days as a free man unemployed and living in a mobile home in Davis, Calif. Before that inglorious end, there had been bottles of fine wine, dinners at elegant restaurants, cars, home computer equipment and cameras. But there had also been losses in real estate deals, commodities futures and mass-produced art.

John Walker contended that they would never have been caught had it not been for "a snitch," his former wife, Barbara Joy Crowley Walker, whose belated report to the F.B.I. in late 1984 is generally credited with exposing the spy ring.

But it was, in part, Mr. Walker's pack-rat habits that proved crucial to convicting him and Mr. Whitworth. Unlike the spies of popular fiction who memorize and destroy their instructions, Mr. Walker saved everything from an advertisement

for an espionage seminar in "Soldier of Fortune" magazine to a closet shelf of maps and instructions for meeting with Soviet agents.

Now that Mr. Walker has fulfilled his agreement with the Government to testify against Mr. Whitworth, he faces sentencing in Baltimore in August along with his son, Michael L. Walker. In exchange for pleading guilty to espionage and undergoing extensive debriefing about the secrets that were passed to the Soviet Union, John Walker faces a sentence of life in prison and a tax lien of approximately \$250,000.

Michael Walker, who was a 22-year-old Navy yeoman when his father tempted him into the the spy ring, is expected to receive 25 years in prison. John Walker's older brother, Arthur J., a retired Navy lieutenant commander, was convicted in a brief nonjury trial last August of stealing classified military data from a defense contractor for whom he worked and supplying them to his brother in exchange for \$12,000. He has been sentenced to life in prison. His appeal, based in part on the assertion that Soviet experts declared the materials he had stolen worthless, was denied earlier this month.